

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 08378 121204Z

43

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SR-02 ORM-01 AID-05 SAJ-01 /072 W

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R 121120Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1455

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

USMISSION GENEVA

USUN NEW YORK 479

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 8378

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, LA

SUBJ: RETURN-TO-VILLAGE PROGRAM

1. IN A TALK WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR PHENG PHONGSAVAN THIS MORNING, I REVIEWED THE STATUS OF THE RETURN-TO-VILLAGE PROGRAM. ALTHOUGH SOME SENIOR MINISTRY OFFICIALS BELIEVE THAT THE RETURN OF REFUGEES TO THE QTE LIBERATED ZONE UNQTE IS UNLIKELY THIS YEAR, PHENG BELIEVES THAT BOTH THE VIENTIANE SIDE AND THE PATHET LAO WILL REACH AGREEMENT ON THIS ISSUE SHORTLY AND THAT A SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES SHOULD BE ANTICIPATED BEFORE THE NEXT PLANTING SEASON IN FEBRUARY/MARCH 1975.

2. I PRESSED PHENG VERY HARD ON THE QUESTION OF ACCESS TO REFUGEE SITES IN PATHET LAO TERRITORY BY REPRESENTATIVES OF DONOR COUNTRIES, THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES AND HE ACTED AS THOUGH THIS WAS ALREADY AGREED TO AND WOULD PRESENT NO PROBLEM. I NOTED THAT WHILE SUSPICION OF THE U.S. APPEARED TO ME TO HAVE DIMINISHED, THE ROLE
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 08378 121204Z

EXPECTED OF US PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF AIR SUPPORT

WAS TOTALLY UNCLEAR. PHENG SAID THAT AIR SUPPORT OF REFUGEES IN REMOTE SITES WOULD INEVITABLY BE REQUIRED AND OPINED THAT THE PATHET LAO WOULD PERMIT U.S. AIR CONTRACTORS TO OPERATE IN THEIR ZONE. I POINTED OUT THAT WE WILL SOON BE RENEGOTIATING AIR CONTRACTS AND THAT IT WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL TO KNOW WHAT TO PLAN FOR.

3. PHENG SAID THAT THE RETURN OF REFUGEES HAD TO BE LINKED TO OPENING UP TRAFFIC BETWEEN THE TWO ZONES AND THAT OVERLAND LINKS WOULD HAVE TO BE RE-ESTABLISHED AS REFUGEES WOULD NOT MOVE UNLESS THEY HAD FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT. CONCURRENTLY THERE WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE MOVEMENT WITHIN THE VIENTIANE ZONE AS SOME REFUGEES WOULD BE RELOCATED IN NEW SITES.

4. COMMENT: THE USUAL LAO VAGUENESS SURROUNDS ALL THIS SO-CALLED PLANNING AND EXPERIENCED OFFICERS IN THIS MISSION ARE SKEPTICAL REGARDING THE LIKELIHOOD OF A HEGIRA IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ON THE BASIS OF TALKS WITH PHOUMI, PHENG AND NGON SANANIKONE, I TEND TO THINK THAT RETURN-TO-VILLAGE IS GAINING MOMENTUM AND THAT IN THEIR OWN WAY THE LAO EXPECT TO GET ON WITH IT. WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, REFUGEE RELIEF
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 NOV 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: cunninfx
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974VIENTI08378
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740325-0712
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741149/aaaabphj.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cunninfx
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 JUN 2002 by rowelle0>; APPROVED <17 MAR 2003 by cunninfx>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RETURN-TO-VILLAGE PROGRAM
TAGS: SREF, LA, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005